

During the fourth week of INEG5253 “Leadership Principles” of the Fall 2013 semester, while reading *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* by John Maxwell, I was struck with the fact that I was overwhelmed. After listening to all of the leadership styles, influences, eureka moments, obstacles, failures, strengths, weaknesses, and legacies from the four speakers and two books covered to date, I was slowly being buried under a wealth of head knowledge about leadership. During these first three weeks, I was diligently taking notes during class and on the readings, trying to absorb all of the information, and striving to implement these new ideas in the classroom, in my research group, and in my personal life, when I realized that the entire framework I was building was about to crumble like a house of cards. At that point, I decided to return to my three core values in order to build a strong foundation to better digest and incorporate the wealth of knowledge gained from class. My confidence in this decision was reinforced after General Steele and Mr. Duke stated the importance of staying inside their value systems, and how this approach provided a foundation for their leadership journeys. My three core values are understanding, awareness, and community. I began developing these core values at the Illinois Leadership Center while obtaining my Ph.D. in 2005, and I try to use these values as a guide in all facets of my life. Therefore, this reflection will look at the information I absorbed from the speakers and the readings in INEG5253 through the lens of understanding, awareness, and community.

The first value I will reflect on is understanding. While there are myriad perspectives on the concept of understanding, one theme came up multiple times during the Leadership Principles class: taking time. This perspective came through in many different ways. Mr. Roberts, for example, advised the class to go slow, give things time, and don’t rush a decision. This concept was enforced in *Leadership on the Line* as well, where Heifetz and Linsky spent time discussing that it takes discipline to unplug, slow down, and create moments of transition each day. In my own personal life, I am fortunate to live close enough to campus that I am able to walk into work within a reasonable time. When I walk into work (generally 3-4 times per week), my day is completely different, both transitioning from home to work in the morning and from work to home in the evening. I believe these thirty minutes of transition, when I don’t have the daily distractions of students, colleagues, and emails, are priceless in my ability to function at work and at home. This time also allows me to have the opportunity to deeply think about both professional and personal issues I am facing. During this deep thought, I can take the advice of Mr. Pincus, who said that every time you think you have a shot, turn around and look at a new perspective. By allowing myself to skip from one thought to another while I walk, I often think of fresh perspectives that I probably would not have thought of during work or at home. The final component to the theme of understanding that was salient to my thinking came from Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was asked by a student during class about how he balances his personal and professional life. He very calmly and confidently said that he doesn’t balance, but he is constantly rebalancing. I often struggle with the amount of time I spend on my work and the cost that it could be charging to my personal life, so this concept gave me a new perspective on how to more successfully address balancing, or rebalancing, of my life.

The second value I will reflect on is awareness. The theme that repeated itself multiple times over the semester in INEG 5253 in terms of awareness was insight. Insight can take many forms, both internal and external. In order to have strong insight, it is essential to have the proper information. According to *The Art of War* (Tzu), information is key. Having key information allows leaders not only to recognize the pieces on the board, but also to give insight on interpreting the pieces. As Sample stated in *The Contrarian’s Guide to Leadership*, leadership is highly situational and contingent. In my work, these two concepts come out most strongly in interacting with my graduate students. When talking about research or mentoring on life, I must not only consider the various possible scenarios to explore (key information), but I

must also consider the student (highly situational and contingent). Each student has a different background, they each “carry their culture and identity wherever they go” (Mr. Peterson), and they each have different goals and aspirations. Additionally, to complicate things even further, according to Dr. White different people see different truths; that is, multiple truths exist. For example, when a situation appears black and white to me, there may be shades of grey that the students see. In order to be a good advisor and mentor, it is up to me to recognize these possibilities and take them into account when interacting with my students. These factors prevent any “one size fits all” solution to advising graduate students. A final glimpse to insight is reflected in the fact that how I interact with students today is different than when I first started, and my methods will probably be different five, ten, and twenty years in the future.

The third and final value I will reflect on is community. Community has a multitude of meanings, yet, in the lens of INEG5253, I believe that the most important aspect of community is understanding people. When working with other people, it is important to be mindful of other’s speed, according to Mrs. Lopez-Willhelm. Some people move fast, some people take the time for deep reflection, and a spectrum of people exist between these two extremes, which means that it is important to understand the speed of people with whom one works. This is important to remember, because according to *The Prince* (Machiavelli), a person is judged by the company he/she keeps, and a group is judged by its weakest member. Therefore, when leading a group, it is important to know the characteristics of each member of the team, as people will classify the team according to who they perceive as the weakest member of the community. One way to raise the level of everyone in the team is to lead by giving the impression that the followers are leading (according to *Lincoln on Leadership*, by Phillips). If the leader takes the time to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the team and purposely assigns roles according to these strengths and weaknesses, each member of the team can feel that they are in control of the situation and are integral participants. This will increase productivity and drive team members to be more productive and have higher levels of contribution. Care must be taken, however, when delegating tasks, as every message that people receive is filtered through the messenger, as stated by Maxwell in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Therefore, skimming the surface of understanding the team members is not adequate, and care must be taken in ensuring that the message is conveyed correctly. This concept reminds me of a statement made by Ms. Judy Braham. Ms. Braham believes the Golden Rule “one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself” as it is often understood and implemented, is self-centered and destructive to communities. While knowing what one wants or needs is important, it is even more important to know what others want and need. Thus Ms. Braham believes the Golden Rule should read “one should treat others as the other would like to be treated.” Once the other is treated as the other would want to be treated, once that is known, the wants and needs of the messenger can be understood and implemented, thereby increasing the productivity and motivation of the community.

Mr. Long provided much of my motivation to write this reflection by stating that we should use books to help in our leadership and personal development journey, but that we need to apply the concepts to ourselves to build on our weaknesses. This reflection is the first step in applying my learnings from INEG5253 to my personal and professional life. I hope to continue implementing wisdom gained from this class in the three facets of my professional life: my research, my teaching, and my service. I believe that all three of these facets can accommodate my core values of understanding, awareness, and community. To do this, I will take the words of Wayne Gretzky and strive to “skate where the puck will be.” And at the end of the day, these thoughts and this reflection is an academic exercise, so I will need to “sit down, shut up, suck it up, and get to work” (Mr. Peterson).